# NATURE STORIES FOR LITTLE FOLK

THE CROOKED OAK TREE

THE LIFE OF A DRAGON FLY

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COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

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# NATURE STORIES FOR LITTLE FOLK

THE CROOKED OAK TREE
THE LIFE OF A DRAGON FLY

BY
E. CARTER AND E. FIELD

WITH NUMEROUS COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHILDREN FILLING THEIR TIN MUGS. *Page* 42.

# The Crooked Oak-Tree.

## CHAPTER I.

On a hill-side there once grew a great oak-tree. Nobody knew how old it was, or how it was planted there.

Every Spring the primroses peeped out of

the ground and saw the brown branches waving above them, and the squirrels came out of their holes to play in the sunshine. The rabbits came out of their underground

houses and chatted about their neighbours, the moles, the sleepy dormice, and the spiky hedgehogs.

Every Spring the sunbeams stroked the brown buds with their soft, warm fingers, till the little green leaves peeped out, and smiled to see the dancing shadows play hide and seek with the flickering sunshine; slowly the leaves grew each year, drinking in the air and sunshine, till in the Autumn they changed to red and yellow, and covered the branches with a blaze of colour.

Then the tree went to sleep, except when the wind woke it to tell it what was happening while the world was white with snow. Sometimes the farmer's children were making a snow-man, sometimes the pond was frozen and the children were skating, and sometimes even the road was blocked with snow, and the farmer had to cut a way through to go to market.

Every April, green and white flowers blossomed on the Oak tree, and, when they faded, tiny nuts were left, which grew into smooth green acorns, each in its own rough cup. They grew ripe, and fell to the ground. Some were eaten when the deer, or the grunting pigs, wandered over the hill. Some were taken by the squirrels, who hid them in a safe corner to eat in the Winter-time.

THE CHILDREN SKATED OR MADE A SNOW-MAN.

*See page* 6.

Some the children found. The little boys called them fairy helmets, but the little girls said that they were fairy cups and saucers, and used them for their dolls' tea-parties.

One rolled down the hill into a hollow

WHEN THE DEER WANDERED OVER THE HILL.

[*See page* 6.

under a rock, and lay there through the Winter in a bed of green moss.

When the Spring came the rain drops poured water on it till it began to swell; then the sunbeams danced round it, calling it to waken, and the acorn began to live!

From the pointed end came a fine white thread which grew down into the earth, and drank up water through a little mouth at the end of it. From the flat end came two tiny leaves, which stretched up through the moss to look at the sunbeams. Then came a tiny stem, and more leaves. The moss saw them, and called to the primroses—

"Why, here is a baby oak tree growing in this corner!"

At the end of that year the great oak-tree was cut down, and the ivy which had grown round it was left lying on the ground, broken and torn. When the primroses peeped out in the Spring, no brown branches waved above them, and the sky looked so wide and empty that they were frightened.

"I think we have got lost while we were asleep!" whispered one. "This must be somewhere else."

"Perhaps the oak-tree hasn't come up yet," said a little bud.

"Perhaps you are only half awake!" answered the Primrose who had come out first, and was a day older than the others. "Oak-trees don't creep into the ground every year as we do."

"Perhaps he has gone round to the other side of the hill," suggested another little bud.

"What a couple of babies you are!"

exclaimed the oldest Primrose, "oak-trees don't go walking about like silly cows and things which have no roots and don't belong to anywhere. No, something dreadful has happened. I wish I could look over this stone, and see if the tree has fallen down!"

She stretched, and tried to grow taller.

"Bo!" cried a Sunbeam, peeping over the edge of the stone.

"Oh!" cried the Primrose, and all the others laughed.

"Hush! don't speak so loudly!" said the Sunbeam.

"Make room for me in that corner, so that we can whisper, but don't let the poor ivy hear us talking. The tree has been cut down, and taken away. The owl has lost her home, and the ivy is broken-hearted; she is lying on the ground, her stems are broken, her leaves are spoilt, and my cousins, the Moonbeams, tell me that in the night she cries because she is so lonely."

"But who cut down the tree?" asked the eldest Primrose, indignantly. "It was a wicked thing to do."

"And the poor squirrels!" went on the Sunbeam. "Two of them got away into the wood, but they had put all their nuts in a hole in the oak-tree, and I am afraid that they would die of hunger. And two

THE LITTLE GIRLS USED THEM FOR THEIR DOLLS' TEA PARTIES.

*See page* 9.

THE OWL HAS LOST HER HOME.

*See page* 11.

were caught by the farmer's boys. I don't know what they did with one, but the other is in a wire cage at the farm. I go to see him every day, to cheer him up, but he is very miserable, poor little thing."

"Oh, what a wicked thing to cut down

TWO WERE CAUGHT BY THE FARMER'S BOYS.

the tree!" cried the Primrose, again. "Poor little squirrel!"

"I must go!" said the Sunbeam. "I must find those lazy violets, and tell them to hurry."

She kissed a green bud, and the yellow leaves peeped out; then she skipped down the hill, and where she passed, new blades of grass came up like the points of little spears; the buds on the hedges smiled and burst into leaf; the yellow celandine threw its leaves after her, so she threw back a bit of sunshine, and where it fell on the celandine seeds they began to ripen.

## CHAPTER II.

The baby oak-tree grew taller, till at last its leaves could be seen above the moss and little ferns. A purple fox-glove nodded to it, and called—

"Who are you? You were not here last year. We were, so we know everybody. Where were you last year?"

"I don't know," said the tree, looking up at the fox-gloves, and thinking how tall and straight they were. "When was last year?"

The ferns laughed softly, and one of them said—

"You are so young, you can't remember. You were here last year, but you were so small that nobody saw you hidden in the moss. But we knew you were there, and when the Winter came we covered you up with our leaves to keep you warm."

"What colour are your flowers?" asked a Buttercup.

"I don't know!"

"You don't know anything, you are so young!" they cried, and laughed so merrily that the tree tried to hide behind a fern-

leaf, ashamed to think how young and ignorant it was.

"Never mind!" said the Fern. "They don't really mean to be rude. The fact is they are all so proud of growing flowers

THE PURPLE FOX-GLOVES NODDED TO THE BABY OAK-TREE.

*See page* 15.

that they think of nothing else. I don't think it is so much to boast about; I would much rather look green and beautiful all the Summer than grow coloured flowers for a week or two, and be dowdy all the rest of the time."

"What are you talking about?" cried a Sunbeam, dancing over the rock, and sitting down on a fox-glove leaf. "What is the little tree sulking behind the ferns for? Were those great conceited fox-gloves teasing it? Oh yes! you are conceited! you know you are! so you need not shake your heads at me like that!" She threw flecks of sunshine at the fox-gloves, and they laughed so much that some of the bells fell off, and the Sunbeam picked one up, and put it on her head for a cap.

"Don't take any notice of them!" she went on. "They think nobody can grow tall but themselves; but wait a bit! you will grow taller than they, and you won't have to begin again at the ground every year, either."

She threw a bit of sunshine into each fox-glove bell, and the little seeds at the bottom began to ripen and turn brown; she popped a bit down amongst the moss, and a scarlet toad-stool grew up and flamed red in the sun-light; and then she ran away.

One by one the flowers faded, the seeds ripened and fell, and all the plants went to sleep.

"Good-bye!" cried one. "Don't get frozen, little tree."

"Don't go to sleep all the time!" said

another. "Tell us all about the snow-storms, and the red berries on the holly-tree when we wake up next year."

"Why don't you go to bed, as we do?" asked a third, "Instead of going to sleep with your head in the air."

"Good-bye," said the Ferns. "You are too tall to be covered up now, but we will put our dried leaves round your feet, to keep you warm."

So they all fell asleep; the nights grew longer, the wind grew colder and fiercer, the rain-drops turned to hail, and the little tree was afraid, and very lonely.

Very few sunbeams came to play on the hill, and they only brought little scraps of sunshine.

"Stay and talk to me!" begged the tree. "You go so soon, and the nights are so long, and so cold."

"I can't!" answered one. "We may only stay a little time in the Winter, for fear we wake the flowers too soon, and they get frozen."

But she crept under the fern-leaves, and left a bit of sunshine there to warm the little tree. A beetle waked up, and grumbled.

"Take away that sunshine!" he grunted. "Don't you know better than to come waking people in December?"

"Put your head in a corner, and don't look at it," said the Sunbeam, gaily. "I didn't bring it for you. Don't grow sulky little tree! The Winter will soon be over, and oak-trees can't grow strong and tall if they can't live through the Winter."

"Shall I grow tall? As tall as the Foxgloves?"

"Taller!"

"As tall as the top of the rock?"

"Taller!"

And then—she looked up, and saw that the top of the rock hung forward, right over the little tree.

"I must go!" she cried, jumping up.

"Just one minute!" called the Tree. "Shall I grow as tall as——"

"I don't know! I don't know! Ask somebody else!"

She ran away, and called to a gust of wind to give her a ride.

"Oh dear! I am so sorry," she said, when she had climbed on his back. "There's a poor little oak-tree growing on that hill, and a great piece of rock hangs over it, and it will have to grow up crooked."

"Humph!" growled the Wind. "I suppose it won't be the first crooked tree in the world."

"That doesn't make it any better for the tree!" snapped the Sunbeam. "I never

did see such hard-hearted, nasty-tempered things as you gusts of Wind!"

"If you say that again, I'll roll you up in a thunder-cloud and leave you there," snarled the Wind, and he tore through the air at such a pace that she had no breath left to talk with, and at last he left her on the top of a poplar tree.

Then he went back, and found the little tree, and played games with it, and taught it how to hold fast with its roots so that it could not be blown over, and how to bend its head to the rushing air so that its stem should not be broken. And, as the tree grew stronger, it began to feel proud that it need not creep into the ground to keep warm, like the ferns and flowers.

## CHAPTER III.

When Christmas had passed, and the snow melted, the tree was so impatient for the Spring to come that the sunbeams laughed.

"Why don't you waken the flowers?" he cried in a cross voice. "I am sure it is time."

"Wait till the frost has gone!" one answered, laughing at him. "Don't you know that the Frost may never have any flowers except his own, and that if he looks at them, they fade? I'll tell you all about it. Once, long ago, the Sun and the Frost lived together. The Sun made flowers, and it took a long time, because they had to grow. The Frost made pearls and diamonds, and he laughed at the Sun, because he made his jewels in a moment, before the flower seeds could be planted. But after a time he was tired of making pearls and diamonds, because they never changed.

"They are stupid things!" he said, "I want flowers."

And the longer he watched the flowers growing the more jealous he felt.

The Sunbeams were sorry for him, and they put a little rainbow in each diamond, and cried, "We like these, too; they are just as wonderful as flowers."

The Breezes took the pearls and scattered them over the world, and shouted, "See how beautiful they are!"

They covered the mountain tops with pearls, when the Sunbeams in their pink robes went in troops to play there, and the people in the world looked up and said, "How beautiful the snow is when the sun shines. Surely heaven must look like that!" But still the Frost was jealous, so the Sun said, "See! I will give you some flowers." He sent the Breezes, and they planted amongst the snowy pearls a little bright blue flower which people call gentian, and a white flower like a star, which they call edelweiss.

Still the Frost was not satisfied; he went one night and stole the most beautiful flowers from the garden of the Sun, but when he planted them in the snow, they all died.

The Sun was very angry. "I would have given you more," he said, "but now, because you are a thief, you shall never come into my garden again, or have any of my flowers. And if you try to steal those which I lend to the earth, they shall die when you touch them, and wither when you look at them."

So now the Frost may never have any flowers except the two which the Sun gave him, and that is why he wanders about the world and makes ghost-flowers on the window-panes, because when the Sunbeams see his poor shadowy flowers melting away they are sorry for him, and go to the mountains, and cover the gentian and the edelweiss with sunshine, and whisper to them to make haste and grow, so that the Frost may have some flowers."

"Is that all?" asked the Tree. "Then go and whisper to the primroses, for it was such a long tale that it must be time to wake them now."

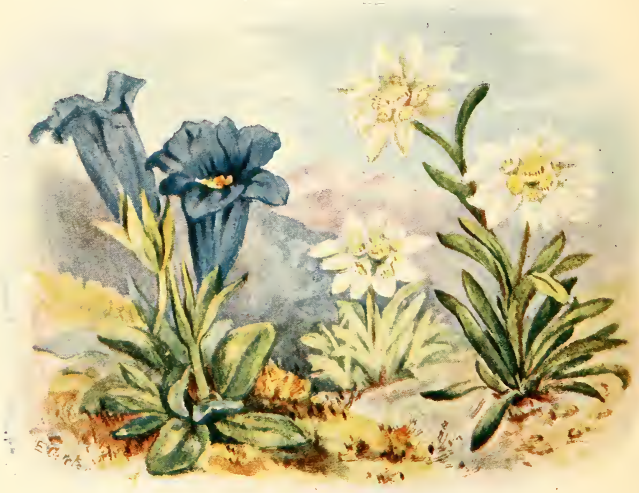
"You ungrateful thing!" cried the Sunbeams. "We wont play with you any more; we wont kiss your new leaves to make them grow, and you will be such a fright that the flowers wont know you; and if you don't have new leaves you can't have new branches, and you wont grow any bigger, so *there!*"

They scampered away, and all the celandine and primroses on the hill were awake, and laughing and chattering, before a little sunbeam crept into that corner, and called to the flowers, and ran away again.

When at last they put up their heads, they shivered, and nestled down in the moss, and talked sleepily to each other.

Then the Oak-tree called to a little Breeze, and sent him to find the Sunbeams, to beg them to come back, for he would never be rude to them again.

He grew so much that year that he called



GENTIAN AND EDELWEISS. *See page* 23.

proudly to a gust of Wind one day to come and look how tall he was.

"I shall soon be taller than the tallest fox-glove!" he said, "and then taller than the rock, and look over it, and see where the big tree grew. It was a wicked thing to cut it down."

The Wind chuckled as he ran down the hill. Then he changed his mind, and ran up again. "Well, I don't know!" he said, turning head over heels before he sat down astride a big stone. "The tree is part of a beautiful ship now, and lives on the sea."

"What is a ship?" asked the Tree, "and what is the sea?"

"The sea is where all the rivers go, and get so mixed up that they don't know which is which; they do nothing but jostle each other about all day, trying to sort themselves out. And a ship—why, it's just a ship. A lot of trees make themselves into flat pieces, and grow together again at the edges, and grow a funny sort of smooth bark, red, and yellow, and black, and all colours. And that's a ship. People and things get inside, and the trees take them across the sea."

"Oh, yes, I understand," said the Tree. "But where do the leaves grow?"

"They don't have leaves exactly," explained the Wind, thinking so hard that he frowned. "Some of the trees only take their bark off, and they stand up in the middle; long grey creepers grow on them, and great white leaves. It's much better fun to play with ships than with trees,

because they can run, you know. We get behind them, and try who can make a ship run the fastest. Sometimes they get so excited that they forget to look where they are going, and run over a rock, but that isn't our fault. And I *have* seen ships try to climb a cliff, but it's a silly thing to do, because they never get up, and the people always make such a fuss, even if the ships don't get smashed."

"Perhaps they wanted to climb up and plant themselves, and be trees again," suggested the Tree.

"Perhaps they did," agreed the Wind, "but if they did, they really *were* silly. It must be better fun to go racing about than to stick fast in one place all the time. I'm tired now of sitting still!"

So he rolled head over heels down the hill for a change.

The Oak-tree laughed, and hoped that some day, when he had grown very tall, and very straight, and very strong, somebody would cut him down and take him where he could help to make a ship, and go racing about with the Winds.

THE OAK TREE

## CHAPTER IV.

The Winds came often to the hill-side ; each had something wonderful to tell, and the Oak-tree dreamed of the time when it would be grown up, and of what it would do.

It would help to make a ship, and run races across the sea. Or perhaps it would be a telegraph pole and listen to the messages running through the wires. Or it might help to build a cathedral, with windows made of the sunset, and a high roof always filled with twilight. Or—best fun of all!—it would be an organ pipe, and catch the Winds, to make them sing!

When he thought of that, he laughed so loudly that a Sunbeam looked up from where she was busily opening the seed-boxes at the back of a fern leaf. When he told her what he had thought of, she laughed too, and threw a handful of seed at him, but she looked at the rock, and she knew that he would never be an organ-pipe.

So the happy time passed. At last the Tree touched the rock with his highest leaves ; then, in a very short time he felt that his head was being bent crooked by the hard

stone. He pushed against it, but his growing stem was very soft and tender.

"Winds! Winds!" he cried, "This stone is hurting me. Come and help me to move it!"

The Breezes fluttered round him, and blew with all their little strength.

"You are only babies!" he said impatiently. "Fetch the Winter Winds."

They came, and blew with all their might, till the tree was shaken to its roots.

"We cannot help you!" they gasped. "We will fetch the Sunbeams; perhaps they can melt the rock."

The Sunbeams came, and poured on it their hottest sunshine, till the grass was scorched brown.

"Stop, stop!" cried the Gorse-bushes. "We shall be set on fire."

"You can't melt the rock!" shouted the Bracken. "It was there before the first ferns were made, and that was thousands of years before the first oak-tree grew."

"Just this one day!" pleaded the Sunbeams. "We will try this one day longer."

But that day was just one day too long, for suddenly, amongst the dry grass, there appeared a little dancing Flame.

"I can't help it!" he said peevishly, in a cracked little voice. "It isn't my fault;

those stupid Sunbeams know quite well that if they put too much sunshine in one place, the Flames have to fetch it away again."

He grew while he was talking, and a procession of little red and yellow Flames came prancing after him. They danced over the grass, and it shrivelled into black dust beneath their feet; they grew taller every minute, and the rabbits and field-mice fled in terror before them. They put their arms round the gorse bushes, and they crackled and turned into showers of sparks. They pranced over the heather, and left a red-hot track behind them. They played leap-frog over the bracken, and it shrivelled into cinders.

A lark on her nest saw the red flames coming. "Not this way," she cried. "Don't come this way! My little ones are too young to fly away."

But her voice was drowned in the crackling of the fire, and she and her little ones were burnt.

"My home and my family are burnt!" cried her mate, hurrying across the hill; and the Winds came blustering up the valley to know what was the matter.

"Go away!" shouted the Flames. "If you come, we will fight you!"

*See page* 31.

*See page* 31.

"Go away yourselves!" roared the Winds. "We will blow you out like a farthing candle!"

The Flames hissed, the Winds howled; they all went fighting up the hill together,

THE FARMER'S CHILDREN LOOKED UP AND SAID, "THERE IS A RAINBOW." *See page* 35.

while the Smoke whirled in and out and covered the trees with soot.

The Breezes flew away, sobbing with fright, to find their mother, the Lady Wind.

"Silly children!" she exclaimed, "Why didn't you tell the nearest Cloud?"

She rushed across the sky, calling to a great black Cloud as she passed.

"Fighting, are they?" he growled. "Just help me along. I'll spoil their little game; I hate Flames."

The faster he rolled along the more he scowled; the more he scowled the blacker he grew, till down on the hill he poured streams of water. The Flames shivered and hissed, and the Winds choked and spluttered.

"Go home!" cried the Lady Wind, sweeping up her children in a heap. "How many times have I told you not to play with Flames?"

"We only wanted to blow them out!" they grumbled.

"Blow them out, indeed! Don't you know the difference yet between a Flame on a hill-side and a candle in a candle-stick?" she asked indignantly. "Then you shall stay at home till you do!"

The cloud was still pouring water on the sputtering flames, and at last they flew away, leaving a trail of smoke behind them. The poor Sunbeams, watching from the other side of the valley, began to creep away, ashamed and frightened.

"Come here!" growled the Cloud. "It

really was your fault you know, though you did not mean any harm, and I am going to punish you."

So he put them all in rows, according to the colours of their robes, and said—

"There! you shall stand like that for half an hour! And then go home, and don't come here again for a week, while I send some little showers to look after the poor burnt flowers and bushes."

And the farmer's children in the valley looked up and said—

"There is a rainbow in front of that big black cloud!"

## CHAPTER V.

Scorched by the flames, and blackened by the smoke, the oak-tree lived on.

Where its stem had been burnt off, two new buds appeared; then two stems grew, and became branches, very thick and strong, but bent and twisted against the overhanging rock.

The sunbeams loved him, and his were the first leaves to be fed with Spring sunshine, and coaxed out of the brown buds; and no other oak-tree was so gay in Autumn when the green leaves turned to red and yellow.

The children said that no other tree had branches so good to swing on, or so many little arm-chairs where they could rest when they were tired.

And he smiled, and played with them, while he dreamed always of the great things which he would have done, if he had grown tall and straight, as well as strong.

"I hate the rock! I will break it," he thought in his anger. He drove little white roots into every hole and crack he could find, and because they could not spread out wide,

as oak-roots should, they grew deeper and deeper, till he found underneath the rock a silent streamlet, which ran on, always in the dark, till it joined a far-away brook.

"Why do you stay down there in the dark?" asked the Tree. "Come out into

*See page* 36.

the sunshine. The flowers are often thirsty, because the hill is so steep, and the ground gets dry."

"I can't!" answered the Streamlet. "Thousands of years ago the rock fell down, and shut me up, and I cannot get out."

"I hate that rock!" muttered the Tree. "It has spoilt my life. But you have not grown crooked and useless. I will break the rock, and let you out."

"Ask the Rain-drops and the Frost to help you," said the Streamlet. "I remember they often split the rocks before I was shut up."

So in the Winters the Rain-drops trickled down into all the little cracks, and the Frost came and froze them into solid ice, so that they swelled, and split the rock; and into the cracks the Oak-tree pushed his roots.

Many years afterwards there came a Summer so hot and dry, that the flowers and ferns drooped and faded, and even the great trees were thirsty.

In vain the Winds flew through the sky, begging the Clouds to bring a little rain. The only thing which was still green and fresh was the crooked oak-tree, whose roots reached far down to the hidden water.

"Can't you find a way out, Streamlet?" he begged again and again. "I have plenty to drink, and everybody else is dying! The earth is cracked all round with the heat, can't you find a way out?"

"I am always trying to find a way out," she said, "but I will try again."

And suddenly she cried, joyfully, "I am

coming! I am coming! Tell the flowers that I am coming!"

Up past the great twisted roots, through a crack in the rock, rose the cool water, till a little silver stream crept out into the sunshine.

It bubbled over the parched moss, and trickled here and there, till it suddenly leaped head-long down the rock, throwing showers of shining spray to the ferns as it passed. It splashed on to the stones at the bottom and threw up little fountains; it gurgled over loose pebbles, and slipped down grassy slopes, and tried to catch the chirping grasshoppers. It sent out baby-streams on either side, and they tumbled into holes, and scrambled about in the loose earth, and all chattered and laughed, and shouted to each other, till there never was such a noisy hill-side.

They danced past the great trees, making fun of them, and teasing them.

"Lazy things!" they cried. "Why don't you grow longer roots? There was water underneath all the time! Are you daisies, or hare-bells, that you wait for us to come out and give you a drink? You are not so strong as our oak-tree."

It was many days before the Streamlet made up its mind which way to go; but at

THE ONLY THING THAT WAS STILL FRESH AND GREEN.
*See page* 38.

THE WATER-BEETLES HAD RACES, WHILE THE FROGS LOOKED ON.
*See page* 41.

last it dug out for itself a channel, and then it was very busy.

It made water-falls over the rocks and still places where the sunbeams leaned over to look at themselves in the water.

There were little grottoes, where the ferns

IN SHALLOW PLACES WHERE BIRDS CAME TO DRINK.

were always green, and pools where the water-beetles had swimming matches, while the green dragon-flies looked on, and the frogs cheered the winners in a loud croak. There were splashing fountains, shallow places where the birds came to drink, and a

spouting stream where the children filled their tin mugs when they played at having a picnic.

All day, Winter and Summer, the Stream sang and chatted to the Oak-tree.

"I'm the happiest stream in all the world!" it chanted.

The Tree laughed; he almost forgot that he was crooked and old, and he quite forgot to hate the rock any longer.

# LIFE OF A DRAGON FLY.

## CHAPTER I.

"Where rushes hide the stagnant pool, or fringe the gliding stream,
And in the sunshine dragon flies like winged jewels gleam."

Away went Libellula as fast as her six legs could carry her, running over the bottom of the pool in which she lived. Suddenly she began to take big leaps and bounds; by drawing in, and shooting out the water in sharp jerks, she was able to get along at a great pace. Now the secret of moving along in the water in this way had been known by her grandmother, and great grandmother for many years.

One of her great, great grandmothers had shown a man who was building steam boats how to do it. So many boats we use now are pushed along by a machine, which first sucks in water, and then forces it out again so strongly that the heavy boat is forced forward in the water, and is thus able to travel about from place to place.

But Libellula was not thinking of all this, she was trying to get out of the way of a horrid great water-beetle, who was always

popping down into the water when least expected, and snapping up one of the larvæ, as insect babies are called.

Libellula went quite a long way before she dared to go any slower, or turn her head to see if the beetle was still following her, but no beetle was in sight, nor were any of her

SHE CHASED A FAT WATER-SPIDER RIGHT INTO HER PARLOUR.

companions, and she did not know that part of the pool, but as there was plenty of food about, she made herself quite happy.

At last she chased a fat water-spider right into her parlour, which was spun of silk in the shape of a bell, and fastened firmly to the

A GREAT FROG CAME DIVING INTO THE WATER.

*See page* 47.

water-weeds by tiny silk ropes, all spun by this industrious little spider, who can live very well on land, but prefers the water which never makes her wet, for her body and legs are covered all over with hairs, nor can the water get through the silk walls of her parlour which is filled with air, brought down from the surface in bubbles by the spider, so that she may have air to breathe while she sleeps, or dines, in her dry, cosy, little home under the water.

When Libellula had finished eating the spider, she found that she could not get away, for the silk parlour stuck on her head, like a cap that was too big for her, and the silk ropes held it firmly fastened to the water weeds, so she was a prisoner in spite of all her struggles; to make matters worse, all the little fish and insects she had been hunting, came and made fun of her, and though she made all sorts of promises not to chase them if only they would set her free, it only made them laugh the more.

Just as she thought she could not bear it a moment longer, splash! splash! came a great frog diving into the water, scattering the small fry in all directions, he bumped against Libellula and sent her spinning into the mud at the bottom of the pool, but when she recovered herself, the spider's silken parlour

was gone from her head, and only a few bits of the silk ropes still stuck to her, and these she could easily rub off against the stones. How glad she was; she even felt grateful to that terrible frog, in spite of the fright he had given her, and she made up her mind to be very careful how she chased a water-spider again.

For some time Libellula contented herself with tiny insects that cling to the water weeds, such as the rotifers, which have wee round bodies, and only one foot, by which they fix themselves to the weeds when they grow old; but when they are young they swim about all over the pool by waving their five little arms backwards and forwards, or the tiny cyclops that have only one eye in the middle of their foreheads like the giants in the old legend.

By degrees Libellula grew bolder, and she tried to drag some of the caddis worms out of their tubular houses, which they build so cleverly of sand or clay, with bits of gravel or leaves and twigs glued all over the outside; sometimes they will glue on a tiny shell with the snail still alive inside.

"Here is luck," cried Libellula, as she came to a stickleback's nest made of the stems of water plants, cleverly woven together and fixed to some reeds. She tried to peep

inside to see if there were any eggs, for sticklebacks' eggs were considered delicious by nearly every one who lived in the pool.

That is why father stickleback builds a nest to keep the eggs in, and keeps guard over them so fiercely. All the fish and insects are more or less afraid of him, even the big pike will not go too near, for the stickleback has a nasty habit of getting underneath him, and then making a sudden rush upwards, cutting a big hole with the three sharp spines he carries on his back.

Just now he was engaged in fighting a flat-headed, goggle-eyed fish called a bull-head, who had ventured to pass too near the nest. He made a poor resistance, and was soon defeated. Then the stickleback, glowing with green and gold and scarlet, colours which always show strongly when he is victorious, came towards his nest to see if it was safe, and was just in time to see Libellula drop the egg she had in her mouth, and make off among the water-weeds. He rushed after her, but she had a good start, and was soon safely out of his reach.

Then she began to regret the eggs, and wished she could have brought some away with her, but after all it was better to be without the eggs than to be eaten up by the stickleback. Soon after there was a

sudden rushing of water, and a big brown water-rat, with a long tail and furry coat, came diving down to feed on the water-weeds.

Libellula had never seen one before, and thought he must have come especially to eat her, so she quickly squeezed herself out of sight into a tiny crevice among the stones, only to find another enemy a few inches off, in the shape of a bull-head, who was just as frightened as she was, and therefore not likely to interfere with her while the rat was there, but though he hid his head so carefully, he continued waggling his tail, which showed every one where he was; even the rat came to see what it was moving to and fro.

Poor Libellula thought both she and the bull-head would be eaten up this time, but unlike his cousin on land, the water-rat only eats vegetables, so after a sniff at the bull-head's tail, and a nibble at the water-weed, he went off in search of fresh pastures.

"I never knew such a horrid place as this," grumbled Libellula, "life is not worth living. You no sooner escape one danger, than you fall into another."

"But, then, you always have escaped," said her friend.

"Yes, but I might not have done so," persisted Libellula.

## CHAPTER II.

Not long after this adventure, one of her friends came swimming by. "Come along," cried he. "I know where there is a big family of little fish, they call minnows, just hatched, and it will be fine sport to catch some of them.

Libellula soon forgot her troubles darting about after the tiny fish; but somehow those minnows disagreed with her, she felt so queer the next day, till at last she was obliged to lie quite still in the mud, and hold on to one of the plant roots. Then something in her back split, and she was able to wriggle out of her old skin, which had grown too small for her. She had a good stretch and felt better and ever so much bigger, in fact, she was no longer a larva, or baby, but a pupa, or school girl. Not that she went to school exactly, like boys and girls, but she felt she wanted to know a great deal, and the first thing she wanted to know was, why two humps had come on her back when she changed her skin?

She asked her companions, but they did not know; some had them, others had not. One said they must be bumps of wisdom, but the others soon upset that idea, by reminding her of all the silly things she had done lately, but

she did so want to know, and made up her mind she would ask everyone she met till she found out, so she asked the newts and all the fish that were not too fierce. She even asked the big brown speckled trout that lay dozing under the bank, but she could not get any

THE OTHER FISH WERE IN TOO GREAT A HURRY.

answer, the trout said "don't bother," and the newts said she was talking nonsense, and the other fish were in too great a hurry, or too busy with their own business to listen to Libellula's questions.

## CHAPTER III.

One night when Libellula was quite tired out she went to bed on a water-lily that had come under water to sleep, and was awakened very early by the lily swaying to and fro and whispering to itself, "I am sure it is time I rose to meet the sun."

"Oh don't move yet," yawned Libellula. "I am so comfortable, stay and tell me where you are going."

"I am going up through the water to the beautiful world above, where the sun shines, and kisses our broad white petals till they unfold and expose our beautiful crown of golden stamens for the sunbeams to play amongst. Oh! it is lovely to float on the surface of the water in the sun's warm rays, and when he goes away for the night we are so sad, and close up our petals, sinking down here in the dark, so that we may keep cool and fresh to meet him when he comes again in the morning."

Libellula was wide awake now; all this was quite new to her. "How far off is this other world?" cried she. "Do you think the sun could tell me why these two humps have come on my back?"

"Pooh!" said the Water-lily, "don't talk nonsense. Why, you would shrivel up if the sun only glanced at you for a second. You had better keep out of his way, I can tell you, for though we love him so, we could hardly bear the heat of his rays, if our roots and stems were not well under water. You do not understand how grand the sun is, he lives thousands of miles away, and can look over more than half the world at once, and yet he shines on each little flower that turns its face towards him."

"Then are there no creatures, only flowers, in the other world?" asked Libellula.

"Oh yes, lots," said the Water-lily, "frogs and rats, kingfishers and dragon-flies. Why, now I come to think of it, you are very like that dragon-fly that came hovering over me yesterday, except for the wings, which were very long, and sparkled with blue, and green and gold, as he darted about in the sunshine. Perhaps you are a cousin of his; or perhaps! perhaps! those humps you spoke of are your wings beginning to grow; wonderful things do happen sometimes, you know, and I remember somebody told me that dragon-flies lived in the water when they were young, but there, go along, I cannot stop talking to you any longer," and the lily rose slowly up, on her way to the other world.

RATS, KINGFISHERS.

*See Page* 54.

THAT DRAGON FLY THAT CAME HOVERING OVER ME.

*See Page* 54.

## CHAPTER IV.

Libellula was too much frightened by what she had heard about the sun, to try and follow the lily, besides she had so much to think of, could it really be true! That she would have a set of beautiful wings, bye and bye. She felt her humps carefully all over, but they were only little hard lumps, then she nearly twisted her head off trying to look at them, at last she persuaded herself that they were a tiny bit bigger, and she felt sure they really were going to grow into wings, and she rushed off to tell all her friends the wonderful news; but, alas! though she was as solemn, and serious, as she could be, they only laughed at her for believing such a silly story.

Why! what use would it be, said they, to have long things sticking out of your back, they would only be in the way, besides no respectable water creatures have wings, only those horrid beetles, who are always rushing down on us from above, so put all this nonsense out of your head and come and hunt for food among the reeds.

They got so angry with Libellula that she was obliged to keep silent and go

hunting with them, but she could not feel any interest, and she let all the insects escape, except the very stupid ones, which nearly walked into her mouth. At last she left off being hungry, and stayed by herself, lying still or crawling slowly over the bottom of the pool, she began to think she would die before the wings grew, because she felt so ill, but the more feeble she grew, the stronger became her desire to see the beautiful world above, that the water lily had told her about.

## CHAPTER V.

At last, she made up her mind she would go to that other world, even if the sun did

LIBELLULA CLIMBED SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY UP. HER SKIN BURST AND SHE STRUGGLED OUT. AWAY SAILED LIBELLULA A REAL BEAUTIFUL DRAGON FLY. *See page* 62.

shrivel her up when she got there, so she laid hold of the stem of the nearest tall reed, and climbed slowly and painfully up

and up, higher than she had ever been in her life, and finally right out of the water, but by this time she was too tired to notice any of the wonderful things in that beautiful world she had so longed to see, and could only cling tightly to the reed.

In a short time she felt that funny feeling in her back which she had felt before, when she changed her skin, and as before, her skin which had rapidly been growing too tight for her since she left the water, suddenly burst, and she struggled out feeling very limp and helpless, her body was all soft, and she had four very crumpled wings, which she now knew had really been packed tightly away in those two humps on her back.

She still clung to the reed, till the kindly sun, and summer breeze, had dried and hardened the outer casing of her body, and her delicate wings, which soon lost their creases, and glistened with blue, and green and gold, as the sunbeams played upon them, and at last they were strong enough to carry her, and away sailed Libellula, now, a real beautiful dragon fly.

All her tiredness, and her troubles vanished, as she darted about hither, and thither, in the full joy of her new life, she felt just as hungry as she did when she was a little larva, at the bottom of the pool.

And now she spends her time in chasing every insect that comes in sight. Sometimes the village children think she is chasing them, and run off in a fright, saying she will sting them, but it is not true for she has no sting, and could not harm them if she would.

Whether Libellula remembers her former life and friends in the pool I cannot say, but she never wanders far from the water, and is very fond of hovering over the water lilies. When the time comes for her to lay her eggs, she never fails to deposit them below the surface of the water, generally attaching them to the stem of some plant, in bunches of about a dozen at a time, while she holds on to the part of the plant which is just above the surface of the water, so that her head and wings shall not get wet, for she cannot live in water after her wings are grown.

And now we must bid adieu to Libellula, whom we have been making friends with, just as if she were a person like ourselves, with thoughts and speech and wishes. We have learnt a great deal about her outside life, which we are sure is all true.

But who can say what it is makes a dragon-fly leave the water at just the right moment and crawl painfully up into the air?

Perhaps if we go on studying God's creatures very carefully, we may in some future time get to understand the working

THE VILLAGE CHILDREN RUN IN A FRIGHT.

*See page* 63.

of their inner life as well as their outer history.